

Chapter 1: The riddle

by Orrien

*An artificial being
Where waters spin and flow
But there has never been
Any familiar glow*

These words sounded like the neverending song in the Spirit's head. Not that it was something bad - it felt more like the dream that you're trying to remember. It has been nearly a month since Spirit Sakura spoke her latest riddle. Since then, it has been slowly becoming one of the "unsolved" cases, where spirits lost their interest after investigating without fruition. There was that one Spirit, which didn't give up though. Why? That is a good question. Was it the desire to be the one who unravels the meaning of the message to others? Or to experience something unexperienced before? Maybe a special bond between them and Sakura? The answers didn't matter. The goal was to decipher the riddle.

Of course the literal meaning was unlikely, but the spirits checked all water reservoirs in the whole Hoa. Even the Dandelion Lake was searched far and wide, with no results of potential... What were they looking for anyways? A forgotten artifact? A vital piece of knowledge? Because they didn't know what to expect spirits started to eventually run in circles in the search for answers. In the past time spirits closely observed any storm and changing water currents, visited Daar Storages, a place deep underground where Daar keep their precious materials. Because that was the place which spirits didn't usually attend, looking through that place sounded convincing. The problem was, in Hoa spirits lived everywhere and their presence was already registered in all parts of the forest. Thus the second part of the riddle still remained an unanswered question. After investigating closely all water-related phenomenon the search was classified as "unsolved" and moved to the special place in the Archives.

The failure hasn't discouraged our Spirit, who was wandering through the grove. The sun was setting and the stars started appearing on the orange sky. Wind blew delicately causing the trees to sing above Spirit's head. He walked with the head up, repeating the riddle again and again. The night seemed peaceful as never before, with noone there to disturb it. That's why a sudden fall was so unexpected. Only after the event did the Spirit realize he stepped on an entrance to the Burrows. Shocked spirit got up and looked around. Yes, they were Convolved Burrows, home of the Foxes on Hoa. Spirit noticed he feels uncomfortable lying there in complete darkness, as the Burrows were reaching deeper that one could think. He stood up, brushing down the dust. Dust? He looked again. Indeed it was dust, which meant this part of the Burrows was uninhabited, or at least not attended in a while. This fact distracted the Spirit from his goal, but only for a minute. Determined to get out, he quickly made a torch and began exploring the Burrows. As he knew, they weren't called "Convolved" without a reason. It was fairly easy to get lost in them, if one didn't memorize the route. And because this part was unknown to our protagonist he had no clue which path to take. Surprisingly, that took his mind even further from the riddle, as exploring unknown parts of the forest was always something entertaining.

The riddle. *"But there has never been any familiar glow"*. Was that it? An interest in deciphering sparked again in Spirit's mind. Encouraged even more he started walking faster, not thinking about paths he was taking. What caught his attention were the drawing on the stone walls, scattered as he was going deeper. Most of them depicted past events or already known facts such as detailed plan of the Archives, which may sound uninteresting. But not for the Spirit. He knew such drawings were an indicator of entering Foxes' Wisdom, where their knowledge was kept. Not that spirits never have been there, but it was rumoured that there are tunnels unexplored before.

Spirit was brooding over those facts, thus he didn't notice when Burrows started to get more twisted. Paintings were suddenly gone, and so was his torch. Without resources to craft a new one he was forced to continue searching sightless. And it was not something entertaining anymore. Though the thrill of adventure was a pleasant feeling, it was wearing off, with the fear awakening in its place. He had reasons to feel that way. "Where am I?", "Why are there no foxes here?", "Am I proceeding somewhere or just running in circles?" These questions started taking over his mind. With each step he felt more lost, the opposite of what he thought he'd feel. No light reached that part, nor stars could shine above his head. Foxes were known for their night vision ability, so lack of any light source was not concerning. He continued the journey running from one wall to another.

No sign of any hope shone on the horizon, until just before giving up Spirit found an old chest. It was the least expected thing he thought he'd find there. Inside, what seemed like a coincidence, he found all needed items to craft a torch. After the flame was lit, Spirit raised his head. Before him he saw a dead end of the tunnel, with another painting on a massive wall. But it was different. After looking closely, it was the map. Not just any map, it was the map of the lands beyond Hoa. To the south, a small, circle area was signed "Kainar". Much bigger area, bigger than Hoa, on the north was signed using red paint as "Altum". A water canal connected Hoa with what appeared to be a lone island on the Great Waters, marked as "Elysium". Spirit stood there, stunned because of what he saw. He never heard of the other lands from spirits, nor from foxes. Now everything seemed connected. *"Where waters spin and flow"*, it was an island surrounded with water after all. *"But there has never been any familiar glow"*. No spirit from Hoa could have been there, as the map was not recorded in the Archives. It had to be that. Spirit quickly scribbled the map on the piece of paper found in the chest. With the light in the cave he noticed a hole in the wall covered behind vines. A small tunnel led to the surface. The moon was high on the sky, silence was omnipresent. But it no longer was a peaceful night. It was the night of the greatest discovery in Spirits life. Possibly the greatest discovery in whole Hoa. Who made the original map? Was it someone who inhabited the forest before spirits? Or maybe this information was meant to be forgotten? Those were not the questions for that time. Now it was time to find Elysium.